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### **Book club looking at other 'Palaces on the Prairie'**

PIERRE, S.D. -- Mitchell boasts that its Corn Palace is the world's only.

That claim could not have been made decades ago, however.

In his book *Palaces on the Prairie*, Rod Evans of Aberdeen tells the story of 34 palaces decorated with grains or minerals that were built in 24 Midwest communities.

Evans will tell the history of some of the palaces when he speaks at the March meeting of the History and Heritage Book Club. The meeting begins at 7 p.m. CST on Tuesday, March 13, at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The meeting is free and open to everyone.

"Many of these palaces have been long forgotten. We are glad that Rod will be speaking to the book club to tell about these buildings and their place in history," said Patricia Miller, president of the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation.

The Foundation is the nonprofit fund-raising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society. The Foundation and SDSHS Press sponsor the History and Heritage Book Club.

Evans is an award-winning playwright and former teacher. He and his wife, Vicki, are involved in community theater and independent filmmaking.

"I learned about the palaces mostly through old newspapers," Evans said. "While researching the newspapers of a particular city that built a palace, mention was often made of palaces in other towns and cities. The list of palaces kept growing and growing."

In South Dakota, palaces of grain, corn or alfalfa were built in Plankinton, Mitchell, Aberdeen, Ipswich, Gregory, Timber Lake, Rapid City and Saint Francis between 1891 and 1932, according to *Palaces on the Prairie*. All the "prairie palaces" had the same goal of bringing attention to a community.

"The palaces were quite successful at promoting the region in the short term, but not to the extent that promoters hoped," Evans said. "The goal was to attract large numbers of immigrants, and that didn't happen. Building a palace often brought a community together in the spirit of cooperation, but keeping a palace going year after year often caused divisions and hard feelings."

The longevity of the Mitchell Corn Palace is mostly due to determination, according to Evans.

“Their palace was one of the least successful in the early years, but the community brought it back to life and made a commitment to stick with it,” he said.

The program is made possible by the South Dakota Humanities Council, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

*Palaces on the Prairie* is available from the Heritage Stores at the Cultural Heritage Center and the Capitol. History and Heritage Book Club members receive 10 percent off their book purchase, and SDSHS receive an additional 5 percent discount, when they purchase the book at either Heritage Store.

For more information, call (605) 773-6006.

**Editor’s Note: The book’s cover is attached.**

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*The South Dakota Historical Society Foundation is a private charitable nonprofit that seeks funding to assist the South Dakota State Historical Society in programming and projects to preserve South Dakota’s history and heritage for future generations.*

*The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council, and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society’s world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit [www.history.sd.gov](http://www.history.sd.gov) for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.*